Indo-France Working Group in Core Sector

1570. SHRI SURESH KALMADI: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that India and France have recently decided to set up a joint working group on Core Sector; and

(b) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (SHRI RAMAKRISHNA HEDGE): (a) and (b) Yes, Sir. At the last Session of Indo-French Joint Committee held in New Delhi on 23-24 November, 1998, it was decided to set up a Joint Working Group on infrastructure to cover roads, ports, railways and civil aviation with a view to focus on sectors with good potential for strategic economic interaction and help identify specific projects for cooperation between the two countries.

Entry of Multinationals in the Tobacco Sector

1571. SHRI YERRA NARAYANA-SWAMY: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether the tobacco Board has done any studies on the impact on farmers by the entry of multinationals;

(b) if so, details of such studies;

(c) whether the Tabacco Board has made any efforts to get the highest value for our tobacco from foreign companies; and

(d) if so, the steps proposed by the Tobacco Board to ensure production of high value products for the benefit of our farmers?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (SHRI RAMAKRISHNA HEDGE): (a) No, Sir.

(b) Does not arise.

(c) Yes, Sir. International merchants are permitted by the Tobacco Board to participate in the auctions conducted by it to create competition for tobacco produce at the platform thereby ensuring most competitive offers for the produce. However, no new international tobacco trading company has sought the permission of the Tobacco Board to participate at auction platforms operated by the Tobacco Board.

(d) Some of the steps taken for production of high value products for the benefit of the farmers *interalia,* include:-

(i) Reorienting production and developmental strategies to the changing international needs i.e., encouraging production of low tar, low nicotine and light soil tobaccos and discouraging production in undesirable soils.

(ii) Enhancing quality and productivity levels of Indian tobacco and reducing production cost so as to make it more price competitive in international marketrs.

(iii) Monitoring and strict control of pesticide residues.

(iv) Aligning grading at farmers level in line with International grading standards.

(v) Development of tobacco in new areas.

Handing over of Tea Estates to Private Owner

1572. SHRI DAWALAMA: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state :

(a) whether Government have any proposal to run Peshok, Putung and Vatukvar Tea Estates, presently under Tea Trading Corporation of India;

(b) whether Government will pay the salaries and wages of workers, as well as other dues, attached with above tea gardens; and

(c) what is the status of proposal to hand over those tea estates to private owners?